

“From Fear to Caution: Overcoming the Health Care Crisis in Madagascar”

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Critical issues

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the fear of contracting the virus led to a decrease in the use of health facilities.
- People who displayed obvious symptoms received immediate treatment as a precaution, whereas those that did not display obvious symptoms avoided healthcare facilities out of fear.



Source: Jeune Afrique, 2021

- Urgent measures need to be undertaken to strengthen communication on the various symptoms related to the health crisis.
- It is important to ensure that each individual in society has access to proper healthcare services including access to community healthcare workers.

What is the issue?

SDG 3 is aimed at “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.” Yet, despite the fact that the covid pandemic affected everybody, it did not increase access to health care services. Indeed, during the COVID-19 pandemic, fear of contracting the virus and restrictions on movement of people led to a decrease in the use of healthcare services in Madagascar. People who displayed obvious symptoms such as fever, received immediate treatment, but those that displayed symptoms not directly related to COVID-19, such as diarrhoea, avoided going to receive treatment at healthcare facilities out of fear. However, as it had been observed during previous pandemics like Ebola, for example, the decrease in the use of healthcare facilities was followed by an increase in morbidity and mortality through diseases that are unrelated to Ebola, such as diarrhoea.

What are the implications?

It is evident that during the Covid-19 pandemic, consultations at health care facilities for patients suffering from diarrhoea decreased. As an alternative, patients resorted to consulting local community health care workers who work on a voluntary basis and have been trained to treat minor ailments. However, in regard to cases of fever, it was noted that there was an increase in the number of patients that opted to visit health care facilities for treatment during the pandemic, and that there was also a reduction in the number of cases of patients resorting to self-medication. Thus individual behaviour is dependent on the symptoms that are displayed by the individual. When it is an obvious symptom that the patients know as being directly related to an epidemic or a pandemic, they are always vigilant and careful, and thus will visit healthcare facilities. However, when it is a less obvious symptom, out of fear, the patient would rather avoid places where they risk contracting the virus. They thus choose to pursue other means of treatment, such as consulting local community healthcare workers.

Recommendations

- Promote literacy on the various symptoms of illness during an epidemic or a pandemic

The aim is to make known the symptoms of a disease so that whenever there is an outbreak, individuals would seek healthcare out of caution. This would help avoid the worsening of the illness for those affected. In order to do so, there is need to share precise and current information, work in collaboration with agents in the communications industry such as social media practitioners, journalists and influencers.



Such a policy would be significant in that the cost of its implementation would be low relative to the cost of treating seriously ill patients (WHO, 2020).

- Training healthcare workers on the diagnosis and treatment of cases during an epidemic or a pandemic.

The objective is to guarantee that those who lack access to healthcare services would have access to proper treatment. Failure to undertake such an investment could cost USD 4.80 Billion in terms of economic losses (Care, 2023).

In conclusion, if the problem of access to healthcare is not resolved, there risks being a sharp increase in the cases of patients affected by an ailment during a pandemic or epidemic. Thus, such actions are of vital importance right from the onset of an epidemic or a pandemic so as to effectively control it.

Sources

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